(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) No bank branch has been permitted to be closed down by the RBI due to VRS.

(e) RBI has reported that 130 loss making bank branches (excluding branches of foreign banks and RRBs) were closed/merged/converted during the year 2002-2003.

(f) IBA has reported the amount paid to the staff opting for VRS till date has been to the tune of Rs. 12,400 crores approximately in all, for all the PSBs.

Implementation of VAT

668. SHRI K. RAMA MOHANA RAO: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) when Government are going to convene a meeting of State Chief Ministers to work out details for implementation of VAT in the country;

(b) what are the details of States which have accepted to implement VAT;

(c)the reasons behind non-implementation of VAT by the remaining States; and

(d) what steps Government are taking to convince the States which have not so far agreed to implement VAT?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI SHRIPAD YESSO NAIK): (a) There is no proposal to convene a meeting of State Chief Ministers to work out details for implementation of VAT in the country.

(b) to (d) A consensus decision to implement the VAT regime in place of existing sales tax system has been expressed in meetings of the Chief Ministers of States/Union Territories held on 22.6.2000 and 5.7.2001. Subsequently, most of the States and Union Territories expressed their commitment to introduce a VAT regime with effect from 01.04.2003. However, this deadline could not be met. A new road-map for introduction of VAT has to be worked out in consultation with principal political parties and the Empowered Committee of State Finance Ministers.